



Lesson 34

I could see peace instead of this.

Sarah's Commentary:

I love how very gentle our teacher is with us. He does not coerce us but simply offers his guidance on how we can change the way we think now. He is not telling us we should see peace only that we have the option to see peace instead of the pain and suffering we experience in the world. He offers us another way of seeing rather than inducing more guilt in us when we are not at peace.

The Lesson is effective, as are all the Lessons when applied with sincerity and dedication. It is a Lesson that helps me see that it does not matter what the situation is, there is always another way I can choose to see it. This harkens back to the Lesson yesterday where we are told we can choose peace no matter what is happening around us. The fact is that peace is already in our minds and is not dependent on anything that seems to be happening. When we look at any situation or circumstance with the ego, we give outside events power to obscure the peace that is in us. Or we look to circumstances outside of us to be just right, so we will have peace. Jesus says our peace has nothing to do with outside events. Nothing outside of us can bring us peace or take it away, but we often do experience loss of peace as a result of external circumstances. When we turn away from the ego because we don't like how we feel, the Holy Spirit shows us another way to see the situation. He reminds us that peace is always available to us. If we don't experience it, it is because we are actually choosing to throw it away. Our part is to look at the choice we are making in the mind and turn to the miracle instead.

We are gently being guided and supported to open our minds to the power within us to choose again. Remember the comments yesterday about our rigid way of seeing things now. Convincing anyone about anything, even using this teaching to do so is a form of violence. It is attacking another's perspective. That is why the Course is big on *not* proselytizing our position. Our only responsibility is to accept the Atonement (the healing of our minds) for ourselves.

This is a powerful Lesson in helping us to see we can always choose peace. But we must do our part, which is to watch our thoughts. It is to bring to mind ". . . **fear thoughts, anxiety-provoking situations, 'offending' personalities or events, or anything else about which we are harboring unloving thoughts.**" (W.34.3.2) If we deny our attacking, unloving thoughts, the Lesson has no value. We need to get in touch with these thoughts rather than denying they are there. We tend to cover up our thoughts when we are in fear, and we become highly defensive. We have established defenses in the belief they keep us safe. "**You operate from the belief you must protect yourself from what is happening because it must contain what threatens you. A sense of threat is an acknowledgement of inherent weakness; a belief that there is danger which has power to call on you to make appropriate defense.**" (W.135.2.1-2) Yet defenses keep us from real peace. They keep us in fear. We are working to protect the self that is not real. Now we are being asked to search our minds for fear thoughts. "**Note them all casually, repeating the idea for the day slowly**

as you watch them arise in your mind, and let each one go, to be replaced by the next." (W.34.3.3) This is important because to look casually is to look without judgment, meaning, we are looking with the Holy Spirit. This means we are willing to see them with some degree of detachment. They are not real and have no real consequences. They are meaningless thoughts we have given meaning.

Jesus says, "**It is from your peace of mind that a peaceful perception of the world arises.**" (W.34.1.4) Everything we see in the world starts with our thoughts. When our thoughts are not peaceful, we see them reflected back at us in a threatening way. But the reality is that nothing outside of us can hurt us, as there is nothing outside of us. Again, the cause of any distress is a projection of the thoughts in my mind. The world is an effect of those thoughts and mirrors back to me what is in my mind. If we get anxious about our experience in the world because someone seems to be "causing" us distress, we have an opportunity to go within and ask to see it differently. Jesus reminds us that peace is a choice we can make. The peace we are seeking is already within us. All that is required is that we uncover how it is being blocked by our beliefs, concepts, and thoughts we are holding.

Our part is to bring our awareness to the thoughts and beliefs, "**and let each one go, to be replaced by the next.**" (W.34.3.3) Whenever we are not experiencing peace, love, and joy it is because our thoughts are blocking this experience from our awareness. We may be feeling rejected, vulnerable, not in control, manipulated, a failure, or even a success. All these experiences can generate fear in us.

Underneath all of our fears, there are beliefs we hold. For example, I am afraid I am a failure because I have a belief I should be perfect, and it is unacceptable to make mistakes. If I make a mistake, I believe I am bad. I consider striving for perfection important as I value my high standards. These beliefs and values I hold put me under a lot of stress. Jesus asks, would you rather be right (about your perceptions and beliefs) or happy? Clearly the high expectations I place on myself do not make me happy. When I do not meet my standards, the ego berates me, and the cycle continues until I am willing to see how I am keeping myself from peace. Jesus asks us to expose our fears so they can be healed. A good place to start is to look at how we feel. Whenever we are not at peace it is an indication we are holding thoughts and beliefs that are not the truth.

If you experience difficulty in having thoughts come to mind and reach a blank spot in your mind, "**continue to repeat the idea** [I could see peace instead of this] **to yourself in an unhurried manner, without applying it to anything in particular.**" (W.34.4.1) Whenever I wake up in the night and feel a strange sense of anxiety not necessarily tied to anything specific, I find this Lesson helpful. It may just be a vague generalized feeling that comes up of sadness, anxiety, worry, or expectations. As I apply this Lesson, I feel a sense of relief. These words, (I can replace my feelings of depression, sadness etc. with peace), repeated often, generally bring a sense of calm to my mind.

Identifying the feelings of distress is important because, as Jesus says, "**You may wonder why it is so crucial that you look upon your hatred and realize its full extent. You may also think that it would be easy enough for the Holy Spirit to show it to you, and dispel it without the need for you to raise it to awareness yourself.**" (T.13.III.1.1-2) (ACIM OE T.12.III.10) We need to be vigilant in watching our thoughts. Jesus urges us, "**Do not hide suffering from His sight, but bring it gladly to Him. Lay before His eternal sanity all your hurt, and let Him heal you. Do not leave any spot of pain hidden from His Light, and search your mind carefully for any thoughts you may fear to uncover.**" (T.13.III.7.3-5) (ACIM OE T.12.III.17)

My experience with this practice is there are many thoughts in my mind that create the kind of experience I am having, but I am not always aware of those thoughts unless I stay very vigilant in watching my mind. This takes work and practice. It is easy to go through the day unconscious of what is going on in our minds. When our thoughts operate in the background without our awareness it is like a computer software program running our day.

We all have had experiences of how thoughts affect us. For example, when we awaken and feel content, the day seems to unfold easily and happily. If something distressing shows up, our happy mood simply accepts the distress easily and things seem to go well overall. The opposite is also true. When we are cranky, everything in the day seems to go wrong. That is why we have these Lessons to start the day happily and recognize that everything in the day offers us a perfect opportunity for healing.

We do not make the correction ourselves. We just need to be willing to have the blocks to peace removed. Peace is already in our minds. It is just obscured by our thoughts. We don't need to acquire peace. We just need to uncover the thoughts that obscure it. The hard part for us is that we tend to judge ourselves for the thoughts we uncover because we think they define us; but they are not what we are. By defending our image of who we think we are, we will not be willing to uncover thoughts we judge as hateful or even murderous.

I often get into the trap of thinking that when difficult situations come up what I need to do is change things "out there" in order to be at peace. I am learning, I can respond to any difficult situation or difficult person by bringing my mind to peace first. It is really possible to bring peace to my mind with whatever situation is upsetting me. From that perspective, if I need to take action, I can take it from a center of peace instead of fighting, overpowering, arguing, or making myself right. It is like going to war in order to win peace. It can never work. Only by doing the inner work can we ever bring about peace. I find I can't always do this in the moment, but when I withdraw from these difficult situations and spend time in reflection, I can inevitably, with willingness, have my mind returned to peace.

Love and blessings, Sarah
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